

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT & BOARD OF HEALTH

Fiscal Year 2008

The mission of the Amherst Board of Health, working through the Health Department, is to promote the health and wellbeing of our community with special emphasis on eliminating health disparities. We fulfill this mission through our core functions: assessment, assurance, promotion, and policy development.

**Assurance:** ensuring that all Amherst residents have the services necessary to maintain or restore good health either by coordinating the delivery of services by other agencies, by policy or regulation development, or by providing services directly.

**Assessment:** systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making available information regarding the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, and epidemiological studies of health problems.

**Promotion:** providing services and educational opportunities that encourage healthy environments and healthy lifestyles.

**Policy Development:** development and implementation of comprehensive public health policies, regulations and legislation.

The work of the Amherst Health Department is organized into six major areas: Access to Health Care, Infectious Disease Control, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Environmental Health, Health Policy and Planning Emergency Preparedness.

### **I. Access to Health Care**

Ensuring access to health care for all Amherst residents continues to be a priority for the Department. Two of the Departmental programs to address these concerns are: Hampshire Health Connect and “Peace in the Family: a Khmer Community Project”. We continue to look for resources to expand our services to other newcomer populations.

#### **Hampshire Health Connect**

Hampshire Health Connect (HHC) is a nonprofit organization created by a group of citizens, providers and representatives of local government, businesses, and the insurers. Its aim is to link families and individuals who are underinsured or who have no health insurance with insurance programs that they may be eligible for or to medical providers willing to see HHC patients at no charge or on a sliding fee scale. HHC is housed in Cooley Dickinson Hospital. The Health Director, Epi Bodhi, is currently secretary of the Board of Directors of HHC.

Thanks to several grants, HHC was able to engage the services of a Latina caseworker, who has been working out of the Amherst Health Department to enroll all Amherst residents, but especially those whose first language is Spanish, in the program. As a result of this, Amherst residents’ participation in HHC as well as the number of Latino clients served by HHC continues to rise.

In the past year, 287 Amherst families were served.

The enactment of Health Care Reform has had a great impact on the work of Hampshire Health Connect. Many who believed they were ineligible for state benefits are now seeking the help of HHC to enroll in the Commonwealth Care Programs.

### **Cambodian Health**

The Cambodian outreach worker position was funded this past fiscal year through a combination of town funds and grants received from organizations wanting to support this work. The outreach worker continues to provide services and advocate for the Cambodian community.

The Outreach Worker, Lauren Srey continues to work with Khmer Health Advocates to provide Diabetes Education and training to the Cambodian community in this area. She also advocates for individuals needing support services in cases of mental health, abuse, sexual violence and other forms of neglect. She promotes self-help, self-education and awareness. She has also worked with many of the elders to help them become United States citizens.

Lauren Srey helps residents for a variety of reasons. Here are some of them:

- 38 Citizen Immigration Issues
- 200 Medical Assistance
- 28 Home Visits
- 15 Employment Assistance
- 67 Housing Issues
- 18 Court Issues
- 2 Mediation Assistance Cases in local schools.

368 total visited by clients

72 Individual clients served

### **Convalescent Equipment Lending Program**

Designated Health Department Staff maintain a loan closet for citizens in need by loaning equipment, handling returns, and receiving equipment donations. Convalescent equipment includes walkers, commodes, shower chairs, tub transfer benches, tub safety rails, canes, crutches, dressing sticks, bedrails, and a limited number of wheelchairs. During FY 08 approximately 74 Amherst residents borrowed 116 pieces of equipment; returned approximately 22 pieces, and donated some pieces of convalescent equipment. The need for lending equipment has increased significantly. Requests for equipment have exceeded the actual availability of equipment.

## **II. Infectious Disease Control**

Controlling the spread of communicable diseases and food-borne illnesses is an important function of the Health Department.

### Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control during FY 08 included the following:

- 2 cases of active Tuberculosis
- 3 cases of Tb prevention and control
- 10,718 doses of vaccine distributed to eleven Amherst providers
- Annual Senior Flu Clinic, in conjunction with the Council on Aging, provided vaccines for Flu, Pneumonia and Tetanus to 275 residents
- Flu Clinic for 86 town employees
- Monthly immunization clinics provided 195 immunizations to 22 adults and 95 children
- 6 cases of Campylobacter, 5 cases of Giardia, 1 case of Group A Strep, 1 case of Group B Strep, 1 case of Hepatitis B, 15 cases of Lyme Disease, 6 cases of Pertussis, 1 case of Shigellosis, 1 case of Strep Pneumonia.

### **III. Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease are another important aspect of the Health Department's work. Programs and interventions are either for the general public or are targeted to certain groups that are at increased health risk because of their membership in a particular demographic group, or as consequences of their own behavior or the behavior of others.

#### **High risk groups**

- The Public Health Nurse has worked with the Survival Center to promote wellness and to link Center users with health care resources.
- The Public Health Nurse collaborates with local partners to explore the development of a Medical Clinic for the underserved and to hold Health Fairs for special populations
- The Public Health Nurse in conjunction with Easthampton, South Hadley and Northampton, is part of a workforce team developing a Municipal Wellness Program for town employees
- The Health Director and Public Health Nurse work with the Council on Aging to ensure that seniors are offered high-quality nursing services.
- Town of Amherst Handicapped Permits are available to residents of Amherst who have a temporary or chronic condition that substantially limits their mobility. This permit allows residents to park in handicapped spaces within the Town of Amherst. This permit WILL NOT extend any privileges beyond Town limits, or to the area colleges. A permit may be obtained from the Amherst Health Department. A doctor's certificate stating the condition and the expected duration of the disability is required.

#### **Alcohol and Substance Abuse Education**

The Health Director continues to be active in several Town, University, and School efforts to examine alcohol abuse, underage drinking, and substance abuse. The Amherst Board of Health received a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1999 to help address this problem of substance abuse in the High School. We continue to participate in SPIFFY (Strategic Planning Initiative For Families and Youth) and the Campus and Community Coalition to Reduce High Risk Drinking and are working towards combining efforts. In the last months of FY 08, Amherst joined forces with these two organizations and four other Hampshire County Towns to apply for a grant enabling us to continue working on this issue.

## **Health Equity**

The Amherst Health Department was one of four communities chosen nationwide to receive the Social Justice Grant from the Kellogg Foundation to address the social determinants of health disparities. The Amherst Health Department widened its focus and structurally designed The Amherst Social Justice Health Project to include representation from the entire municipality of the Amherst Town Government. Our rationale for structuring our project in this manner, was to create an environment throughout the municipality that would stimulate dialogue and foster the awareness of personal views regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Our immediate goal in the first phase of this project is to move beyond the awareness and recognition of our personal views and to look at how these views influence the way in which we perform our jobs, individually and collectively as a municipality, and how we, ultimately as a municipality, affect the lives of the residents that we serve as a result of our views regarding race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

To gain a multiple awareness of how our residents are affected by the way the Town of Amherst conducts its business, we structured the dialogues in the following manner: Phase I—Eight dialogue sessions with one representative from each department. The exception being, that of the Health Department, which chose to include its entire staff; Phase II—two dialogue sessions with Town Department Heads to be conducted in the next fiscal year: the first with the Town Manager, Department Heads, Health Director, Social Justice Facilitator, Social Justice Grant Coordinator, and the second with Department Heads and the Social Justice Dialogue team. These sessions will include, but not be limited to, discussing the implementation of the recommendations made by the department representatives (i.e. shifting how we do our work by incorporating what we have learned); Phase III—a town viewing of Unnatural Causes with a facilitated panel discussion, and a series of dialogue sessions with various communities within the Town of Amherst. These dialogue sessions are to gain a perspective on how the Town of Amherst conducts business with individuals within various communities of the Town.

To date, we have completed seven of eight dialogue sessions in the first phase of our project.

### Activities to date

1. Hiring Dialogue Facilitator
2. Hiring Project Assistant/Health Educator to manage details of the project
3. Discussion of the nature, outline, and design of the project
4. Meeting with Town Manager to secure support to make the project town wide
5. Meeting with all Department Heads to secure Department Representatives
6. Selection of Department Representatives for dialogue sessions
7. Scheduling of dialogue sessions with Department Representatives
8. Curriculum development for dialogue sessions
9. Start of dialogue sessions
10. Data collection—(ex: participant assessments)
11. Planning and of Department Head sessions
12. Planning for Community Dialogue sessions.

The Health Director and Health Educator are in communication with the other grantees. We share our experiences and brainstorm ways to move this national program forward in each of our localities.

#### **IV. Environmental Issues**

The Board of Health is required by state statute to perform many pertinent duties relating to the protection of public health, disease control and to advocate sanitary living conditions.

The Board of Health's Environmental Health Division staff consists of 2 Inspectors. Their responsibility is to regulate the laws. This fiscal year our department experienced a loss of work hours due to a loss of our Administrative Assistant and Senior Sanitarian. With minimal staffing, the department made every effort to fulfill the required inspections. Ellen Bokina, DC, MPH, RS joined the Health Department staff on January 2, 2008 as the new Sanitarian/Environmental Health Coordinator. We conducted 825 inspections and issued 342 Town permits.

#### **Food Safety**

The Environmental Health Division inspected 238 food handlers during the FY 08. We administer licenses and permits for all food handlers encompassing: restaurants, recreational camps, bed and breakfast operations, residential kitchens, college institutions, hotels, motels, retail food stores, schools, mobile food units, temporary events, caterers, bakeries, and frozen food establishments.

Routine inspections and the perseverance of this division is a crucial role to protect the public health's welfare. The division enforces Chapter X of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standard for Food Establishments, 105 CMR 590.000. These state laws allow the Town of Amherst to conduct inspections, issue orders and suspend or revoke licenses and permits where necessary.

Since the state's adoption of the 1999 Federal Food Code, the Environmental Health Division collaborated with local restaurants to be in compliance with new regulations. The code requires all restaurants to have a person in charge (PIC) who has knowledge of food-borne disease prevention and application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. We will continue to monitor food managers to ensure the obtainment of their Food Manager Certification and to develop a food protection program.

#### **Body Art Establishments**

There are three Body Art Establishments and 11 licensed practitioners in Amherst. The Inspectors were able to conduct 6 inspections.

#### **Massage Therapy & Tanning**

Under authority of Section 31 of Chapter 111 and Sections 51 and 53, Chapter 140 of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Health Department issued a total of 18 licenses to massage therapist, massage establishments and tanning operations. Unfortunately, due to the lack of staff, inspections were limited. As of January 1, 2008, Massage Therapy Licensure was taken over by the Commonwealth under the Division of Professional Licensure.

## **Swimming Pools**

No person shall operate or maintain any swimming, wading or special purpose pool without obtaining a license from the Health Department. The permit shall be subject to the requirements of 105 CMR 435.00 and to any regulations as may be adopted by the Board of Health, provided, however, that said local board of health regulations shall not be applicable to a state owned or operated swimming, wading or special purpose pool. The Health Department issued 18 swimming pool permits, including 2 residential swimming pools.

## **Recreational Camps**

We continue to perform extensive monitoring and inspections to sustain quality and assurance of compliance. This fiscal year there were 22 recreational camps.

Camp operators can request CORIs and SORIs online. The turnaround time for such a request is estimated to be 4-5 business days. We recommended that all camp operators use the online feature. Because of this, some camps that had fallen behind on criminal and sexual history requests were able to get results in time for their scheduled inspection.

Throughout the year we receive new information from the Community Sanitation Program. The Department makes every effort to forward the new material and information to all of our camp operators in a timely manner. Although, the Environmental Health Division continues to distribute informational packets; these packets are now made available online.

## **Housing**

The Health Department upholds all nuisance and housing complaints. Chapter II of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standards of Fitness for Human Habitation, M.G.L. c.111, ss. 127A and 127B: 105 CMR 410.000, upon request or upon the Department's initiative the Health Department can certify violations, issue orders, hold hearings, grant variances and institute court proceedings; if necessary to enforce such orders. This fiscal year our Housing Inspector conducted 117 inspections including fraternities, sororities and voucher program related issues.

M.G.L. c.111, s.122, allows the Health Department to investigate nuisances which in the board's opinion may be injurious to the public health. The Health Department may destroy, prevent or remove such nuisances and make regulations relative. There were 140 nuisance inspections mostly involving trash. All nuisance complaints were addressed and abated.

## **Subdivisions**

The BOH has 45 days to review and approve or disapprove preliminary and definitive plans for the subdivision of land, M.G.L. c.41, and ss.81S-81V. Failure to act is deemed an approval. The Health Department considers drainage, water pollution, sewage and potential damage to well fields.

## **Septic System**

The Amherst Health Department enforces the State 310 CMR 15.000, Environmental Code, Title 5: Standard requirements for the siting, construction, inspection, upgrade, expansion of on-site sewage treatment, for the transport and disposal of septage. This fiscal year our Health Inspectors conducted 16 percolation tests and 8 septic system plan reviews and finals.

## **Septage and Garbage**

The Health Department enforces Title V of the State Environmental Code; Minimum Requirements for the Subsurface Disposal of Sewage, 310 CMR 15.00. This year we issued 9 septage hauler and 5 installer licenses for the removal or transportation of garbage and offal this fiscal year.

## **V. Emergency Preparedness**

The Health Department continues to develop a volunteer medical provider pool through the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program. There are currently 30 health care providers on the Amherst MRC roster and 45 volunteers overall. The group is trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS) operations, Shelter Operations, and other public health emergency and disaster preparedness-related topics.

This past spring, the Amherst MRC took an active role in an emergency shelter setup for Northampton fire victims. The Red Cross/MRC fire shelter volunteers worked along with the Salvation Army to provide meals for fire shelter victims. Volunteers assisted in serving meals, talking with victims who had psychological needs, and keeping general order. The Amherst MRC also took part in a telephone/email communication drill in which all Hampshire County MRCs had a role. Since the fall of 2004, the Amherst MRC has held monthly training sessions and has participated in a variety of ongoing public health outreach and education projects. Projects this year included the Relay For Life of Hampshire County, The Big E, "In case of emergency—ICE" campaign, and the Emergency Preparedness Community Campaign.

The Health Department staff is involved in several local preparedness organizations such as the Hampshire Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition, the Metropolitan Medical Response System, and Five College Public Safety Emergency Preparedness.

## **VI. Health Policy and Planning**

The Board of Health is responsible for setting policies and creating regulations to protect the health of Amherst residents. Board of Health members are: David Alhfeld, Nancy Gilbert, Ellen Pile, Sandra Sulsky (Chair), and Alan Weiner. Under Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L.), state and local regulations, Boards of Health have a broad range of responsibilities for making and enforcing policies that promote and protect the health of citizens.

The Board must conduct an in depth analysis of the many issues that comes before it. This year issues have included the development of regulations for the use of outdoor wood boilers; standards for the quality of private drinking wells, including an inspection protocol and schedule to maintain water quality; and regulations for businesses employing potential biological hazards, including rDNA technology. Other issues managed by the Board included senior nursing services, body arts, including tattooing and piercing, and exposures to tobacco smoke in private residences.

The Health Director is an active member of the Executive Committee, Board of Directors and Social Justice Strategic Direction Team of NACCHO (National Association of County and City Health Officials.). Because of her active participation in NACCHO, Amherst is often able to avail itself of national resources not often used by smaller jurisdictions such as ours. We have been eligible to receive special funds and technical expertise.

The Health Department works with agencies in public health as well as human services throughout the County to ensure that all residents have access to needed services and, as such, is an active member of the Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth (SPIFFY) as well as the Healthy Communities Committee of Cooley Dickenson Hospital. The Health Director was asked to represent the Massachusetts Public Health Association as a participant in the Coalition for Local Public Health, a statewide coalition made up of representatives of the five statewide organizations that advocate for local public health. The Coalition works with state officials to ensure that Massachusetts residents receive the best public health services available.

### **FY 08 Board of Health**

David Ahlfeld  
Nancy Gilbert  
Ellen Leahy-Pile  
Sandra Sulsky (Chair)  
Alan Weiner, MD  
Epi Bodhi, Health Director